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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON ITS TWENTY-SIXTH SESSION

Draft report

Addendum

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Chapter ____ . DEMOGRAPHIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS

B. Civil registration and vital statistics

1. The Commission considered item 9 (b) of its agenda at its 443rd meeting, on 7 February 1991. It had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Secretary-General on progress in civil registration and vital statistics (E/CN.3/1991/19);

(b) Report of the Secretary-General containing updated information on the work of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (E/CN.3/1991/30).

2. The Commission was of the opinion that the Secretary-General's report (E/CN.3/1991/19) provided valuable and timely information on the progress made in the field of civil registration and vital statistics in different parts of the world since the subject was last discussed by the Commission (in 1981, at the twenty-first session). It expressed satisfaction that the revised Handbook of Vital Statistics Systems and Methods and the study on approaches in population censuses to collecting information for estimating vital rates had been completed. It requested that the Handbook be disseminated widely for use by national registration authorities, statistical offices and others concerned with the subject. The Commission emphasized the importance of national civil registration

systems and the collection and compilation of vital statistics, nationally and internationally, for the timely and cost-effective monitoring of population, health and related programmes.

3. The Commission welcomed the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems, developed jointly by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund and the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, and gave its strong support to the programme. It noted with satisfaction that a number of other organizations, including the United Nations regional commissions, the Pan American Health Organization and the International Statistical Institute, would participate in the implementation of the Programme. The Commission invited other international, regional and bilateral organizations to participate in and support the Programme.

4. The Commission noted with satisfaction that the Programme was country oriented and employed a number of new strategies designed to overcome some of the weaknesses of recent technical co-operation efforts in the field of civil registration and vital statistics in order to allow sustainability nationally. Such strategies involved (a) the structured diagnosis of problems on a country-by-country basis; (b) concentration on the improvement of national civil registration systems rather than pilot studies; (c) adoption by countries of national registration improvement plans along with the commitment of necessary national support; and (d) initial focus on those developing countries which offered the best opportunities for achieving complete registration of events in the short run so that the lessons learned could be applied to other developing countries.

5. Some members expressed concern about the willingness of countries to invest the resources and staff necessary to participate in the Programme and about their long-term commitment to continue civil registration operations since improvement of the civil registration and vital statistics systems in developing countries could, in certain circumstances, require a large amount of financial resources. It was pointed out, that in many countries, improvement of national civil registration and vital statistics systems would require not only that methodological problems be solved but that socio-cultural, legal and administrative obstacles be overcome. Motivation of the population was seen as a critical factor in improving national registration systems. However, the Commission was of the opinion that the new strategies embodied in the Programme might help to overcome a number of those obstacles. It expressed the hope that the guidelines adopted by donor organizations in the field of civil registration and vital statistics would be reviewed in the light of the Programme's strategies. In that regard, the Commission recommended that monitoring to evaluate programme achievements be continued.

6. Many Commission members from developing countries referred to their experience in upgrading their national registration systems. They attached great importance to the Programme and expressed interest in joining it so as to strengthen civil registration and improve the availability of vital statistics in their countries.

7. The Commission welcomed the financial support provided by UNFPA and UNICEF for the initial phase of the Programme and the willingness of UNFPA to commit additional funds for the period 1992-1995. It noted that a portion of UNFPA support was conditional upon other multilateral or bilateral organizations matching that support.

8. The Commission stressed the importance of co-ordination of activities among the various organizations participating in the Programme. It expressed its appreciation of the offer made by UNFPA to act as the focal point for co-ordinating multilateral and bilateral resources for the Programme. The co-ordination role would be carried out in close co-operation with the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, which would be responsible for overall substantive co-ordination.

9. The Commission urged the organizations sponsoring the Programme to conduct promotional activities worldwide and to proceed with the implementation of the Programme. The work of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, in co-operation with the regional commissions and PAHO, was particularly stressed.

10. The Commission welcomed the suggestion to conduct workshops in Latin America and in Africa as part of the Programme and expressed its appreciation to the Government of Argentina for offering to act as host for one of the workshops. The Commission stressed that the objective of any workshop should be clearly defined before it was organized.

Action taken by the Commission

11. The Commission:

(a) Endorsed the phased implementation of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems and expressed its appreciation to the organizations that had developed the Programme and to UNFPA and UNICEF for providing initial financial support;

(b) Stressed the central role of national efforts in the success of the Programme, including diagnosis of obstacles to complete and timely registration and the adoption of national registration improvement plans along with the commitment of the necessary national support;

(c) Accepted the offer of UNFPA to provide the mechanism for co-ordinating support for the Programme from other multilateral and bilateral organizations and noted the importance of a co-ordinated approach;

(d) Urged the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, in co-operation with the regional commissions, WHO, PAHO and the International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics, among others, to proceed with the training and other components of the Programme as rapidly as possible;

(e) Requested the Secretary-General to keep the Commission informed about the progress achieved in implementing the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems and related methodological work.
